

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A hydrometallurgical process for treating metal-containing sulfidic materials comprising metal-containing sulfide ores and concentrates, comprising reacting said metal-containing sulphidic materials with concentrated sulfuric acid at a temperature of between about 300°C and 400°C in the presence of oxygen to produce a solid metal sulfate product and a gaseous product which is primarily SO₃, wherein said metal is selected from the group consisting of iron, copper, zinc, nickel, cobalt and manganese.
2. (Original) A process according to claim 1, wherein said metal sulfate product is then leached with a dilute solution of sulfuric acid, having a concentration of between 5% and 35% to extract metal values therefrom and to form a metal-containing solution.
3. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 2, wherein said SO₃ gaseous product formed from said reaction is subsequently combined with said metal-containing solution in stages to raise the concentration of sulfuric acid in said solution to about 35% to 50% and to effect the stage-wise precipitation of metallic sulphates from said solution.
4. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the amount of sulfuric acid upon mixing with one weight portion of sulfide ore is ≥ 0.94 weight portions of 98% sulfuric acid.
5. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1, wherein the hydrometallurgical sulfatization process is carried out at a temperature of between 330°C and 350°C.
6. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1, wherein the hydrometallurgical sulfatization process is carried out in the presence of oxygen from the air, its

amount being $\geq 150\%$ of the stoichiometrically required amount to convert the sulphide content of the metal-containing sulfidic starting material to SO_3 .

7. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1, wherein leaching of the solid metal sulfate ~~sulfatized~~ product is carried out in solution of sulfuric acid, having a concentration of about 15% to 25%.

8. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 3, wherein separation of metallic metal sulfate from the solution was made by its precipitation in sulfuric acid solutions of 40%-45% H_2SO_4 .

9. (Original) A process according to claim 8, wherein a high concentration of sulfuric acid is achieved by saturation of the solution with gas SO_3 at room temperature.

10. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9, wherein purification of sulfuric acid from at least a portion of [[the]] admixtures aimed at production of the acid ready for sale was performed by saturation with gas SO_3 up to a concentration of sulfuric acid of 98.3%.

11. (Original) A process according to claim 1, wherein said metal is iron.